Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Summary record of the 2296th meeting
Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Wednesday, 23 May 2018, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Winter

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Consideration of reports of States parties (*continued*)

Combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Norway (CRC/C/NOR/5-6; CRC/C/NOR/Q/5-6 and CRC/C/NOR/Q/5-6/Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Norway took places at the Committee table.*

2. **The Chair**, recalling that the Committee's role was to assist and not to judge States parties, said that it had been brought to the Committee's attention that the Norwegian Parliament had decided not to ratify the third Optional Protocol to the Convention — which of course it was perfectly entitled to do — on the grounds that the Committee was not competent to deal with individual communications. The Committee obviously did not share that view. Similarly, in a decision concerning a child, the Supreme Court of Norway had argued that the Committee was not competent to interpret the Convention. In that regard, she drew attention to the decision of the International Court of Justice that treaty bodies were indeed competent to interpret their conventions. She hoped that the interactive dialogue with the delegation would go some way towards changing the State party's perception of the Committee, which was not shared by any of the other States parties to the Convention.

3. **Ms. Helleland** (Norway) said that her Government deeply respected the Committee's competence, knowledge and engagement for the rights of children. In the eight years since Norway had last appeared before the Committee, there had been many positive developments that had had a major impact on children's rights. As recommended by the Committee, in 2014 the protection of children's rights had been further enhanced with the inclusion of a new provision in the Constitution stating that children had the rights to have their human value respected, to be heard on issues that affected them, to have their opinions taken into consideration and to have their personal integrity protected and that the child's best interests should be a fundamental consideration in actions and decisions regarding children. Amendments had been made to health and care legislation to strengthen and clarify the legal position of children and young people as patients and users of services and grant them the right to receive information and to have their opinions taken into consideration.

4. Protecting children's rights had long been a key goal of the Government. The child welfare services, which were constantly being improved in line with the Convention, were expected to ensure that all children received the help and care they needed at the right time. Amendments to the law had recently been approved that would strengthen the legal safeguards afforded to children and parents in child welfare cases. Children now had a statutory right to receive the child welfare measures they required and to be heard in child welfare cases. Work was also under way to update the Child Welfare Services Act. Child welfare services had also increased staffing levels in municipalities and efforts were being made to enhance their expertise. Additional funding had, furthermore, been allocated for preventive measures in municipalities.

5. The Government had prioritized action to combat violence and sexual abuse against children. State-run children's houses ensured that children who had suffered violence and sexual abuse received good, coordinated follow-up. In view of the long distances to children's houses and waiting times for interviews in a number of police districts, several secondary units had been established in some counties so that child victims received help as quickly as possible. In 2016 and 2017, several major cases involving online abuse of a very large number of children had been uncovered and investigated by the Norwegian police. Cross-sectoral measures were being developed to meet the challenges and contribute to a comprehensive effort against online child abuse. On 7 May 2018, the Parliament had approved the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse. A proposed amendment to the Marriage Act, setting an absolute minimum legal age for marriage of 18 years, without any exceptions, had been debated in parliament the day before.

6. The Government wished to ensure that children were treated with respect and provided with the best possible formative conditions. All kindergartens must build on the core values set out in the Kindergarten Act and the international treaties to which Norway was a party. Work had begun on modifying compulsory education curricula to equip young people to cope better with work and family life later on in their lives. That work was based on a multidisciplinary approach to three topics: democracy and co-citizenship, sustainable development and life skills and public health. Health centres and school health centres did very important work helping children and young people who were struggling, and funding for those services had gradually been increased from 2014 to 2018.

7. Norway offered age-appropriate living and care provision for unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors. State child welfare services had a statutory responsibility for those under the age of 15, while the immigration authorities were responsible for those aged between 15 and 18. While the Child Welfare Act applied to all children in Norway, a number of measures had been introduced in recent years to ensure that unaccompanied minors systematically received proper living and care conditions. For example, action had been taken to increase staffing levels and child expertise in reception centres for unaccompanied minors over the age of 15.

8. In 2016, the Government had presented its action plan to combat human trafficking, and in 2017, the parliament had approved the establishment of a central unit with responsibility for following up underage victims of human trafficking and advising local child welfare offices in cases of suspected trafficking. The establishment of a special unit for imprisoned children had been piloted and turned into a permanent arrangement and a second unit had been opened. A new function had also been introduced in ordinary adult prisons, namely that of "child-responsible" personnel, who were tasked with taking care of children with imprisoned parents.

9. **Ms. Aldoseri** (Coordinator, Country Task Force) said that she would be interested to know whether the State party had a comprehensive national strategy on children. She wished to know whether the funding provided to municipalities was explicitly linked to the implementation of the Convention and whether there were plans to match the increased demand for child welfare services in certain counties with a corresponding increase in funding. She would like to know whether the State party had taken guidance from the Committee's general comment No. 19 on public budgeting for the realization of children's rights and whether there was any tracking of the budget allocated in order to assess implementation of the Convention.

10. The delegation might indicate which authority had the overall mandate for coordinating implementation of the Convention in the municipalities. Noting the apparent reluctance on the part of the Government to mandate the Ombudsman to receive complaints from children, she said she would welcome information on which authority had that mandate. She would like to know whether, in addition to having complaints filed on their behalf by their parents, children could lodge complaints directly with a county governor's office and, if so, whether the office was accessible and child-friendly. She would like to know whether such offices received complaints concerning all aspects of a child's life or just about education and what happened if the subject of the complaint was one or both of the parents.

11. She would like to know what impact the recent granting of new licences for the extraction of fossil fuel in the Barents Sea would have on children in general and Sami children in particular. She would welcome details of any measures put in place to protect children's rights from being violated in that context, for example through labour exploitation, and whether there had been any consultation with children, including Sami children, about those activities. She would be interested to hear how the Government was engaging with civil society organizations that were mobilizing to safeguard children's rights in the context of the new extraction work.

12. Regarding the proposed amendment of the Marriage Act, the delegation might provide an update on the outcome of the initial debate in parliament and indicate whether the amendment would include removal of exceptions for extrajudicial religious marriages.

She wondered whether the marriages of underage refugees or migrants were recognized and, if not, what happened to such unions.

13. She would welcome confirmation as to whether or not the Norwegian Nationality Act contained a clear definition of statelessness. She would also be grateful for an update on the preliminary results of the review of the report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees that recommended the automatic granting of nationality to children born in Norway if they would otherwise be stateless. She would be interested to hear about measures being taken to create an environment that allowed for the integration of migrants, Sami children and other minority groups and helped at the same time to preserve their identity. She wished to know why intersex children who changed their gender could not change their names to match their new gender identity immediately rather than having to wait until the age of 16. Lastly, she would appreciate information on the level of engagement of the media in protecting children's rights and what was being done to curb the sexualization of children, especially girls, in the media.

14. **Mr. Kotrane** (Country Task Force) said that the Committee welcomed the progress made in recent years, including the constitutional amendment on the rights of the child and the ratification of a number of international instruments, although it hoped that the third Optional Protocol would also be ratified at some point. The Committee remained concerned about the State party's reservation to article 10 (2) (b) and (3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights with regard to the obligation to keep accused juvenile persons and juvenile offenders segregated from adults, as it also had an impact on implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Were there any plans to withdraw the reservation?

15. He would welcome an update on the revision of the Child Welfare Services Act to ensure it was fully compliant with the provisions of the Convention. The Committee shared the concern expressed by the Human Rights Committee in its recent concluding observations that articles 2, 4 and 16 of the Constitution emphasized Christian values and placed the Evangelical Lutheran Church in a position of privilege vis-à-vis other religions. Noting that, under the amended Education Act, the school subject "Religion, Philosophies of Life and Ethics" had been changed to "Christianity, Religion, Philosophies of Life and Ethics", he said that he would like to hear more about the steps taken to ensure that children learned about religion from a pluralistic perspective. When it came to independent schools, he wished to know what guarantees were in place to provide religious education in a manner fully compliant with the Convention.

16. He wished to know whether there had been any cases in which the authorities had intervened to have a child's right to privacy, especially online, respected and what efforts, in addition to the constitutional amendment and enactment of legislation, had been made to achieve progress in that area.

17. **The Chair**, speaking as a member of the Country Task Force, said that she would welcome an update on the outcome of the recommendation that all educational institutions should consider the need for follow-up in their training courses on the Convention. She would also be interested to hear about training for other professionals working with children, including health-care and judicial personnel. She wished to know whether the Convention and the Committee's concluding observations were disseminated in minority languages.

18. **Ms. Otani** (Country Task Force) said that, while the Committee welcomed efforts made in the area of non-discrimination, she would welcome clarification of the statement in the replies to the list of issues that "both children and seniors can be treated unequally because of their age". Noting that Sami children and children belonging to other minorities experienced discrimination in various areas of social life, she said she would like to know whether the causes of such discrimination had been identified and studied and whether special measures had been developed on that basis. She would be interested to hear about the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex children, children with disabilities and children with an immigrant background, specifically whether they were subjected to bullying or discrimination and whether teachers were trained on how to treat them appropriately.

19. She would like to know whether any action was being considered in follow-up to the recommendation by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women concerning the over-sexualization of girls in the media. The Committee was concerned that the principle of the best interests of the child was not explicitly incorporated into several important laws, such as the Health and Care Service Act. It was also concerned by the decision in which the Supreme Court had found that the immigration authorities were not required to explicitly determine the best interests of the child in immigration and asylum processes. The delegation might comment on the impact of that decision in practice. She would also be interested to hear whether the views of children, including children with disabilities and migrant children, were respected in practice in the family, community and school. Was the right to be heard applied in all legal and administrative proceedings affecting children, including custody and asylum cases? Was the concept of respect for the views of the child understood by parents, teachers and professionals, and were relevant professionals trained to listen to the views of the child in an age-appropriate and child-friendly way?

20. She wished to know whether youth forums operated in all municipalities and were accessible to all children, including children with disabilities, children with an immigrant background and younger children. Did children receive the necessary support to ensure their meaningful participation? She would be interested to hear about the impact of the measures taken to end violence against children and whether children were well informed about their rights and where they could seek protection or file a report if they experienced abuse or violence. Noting that, according to a survey, 7 to 8 per cent of students had been subjected to violence by adults in school, she said she would like to know how such cases were dealt with when reported and what remedies were available to the children concerned. She would like the delegation to comment on the effectiveness of the helpline for children and young people and whether there was a high level of awareness of its existence and how it could be accessed. Lastly, she would be grateful for an update on any action taken in response to the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Human Rights Committee concerning sexual abuse in the Sami community.

The meeting was suspended at 3.55 p.m. and resumed at 4.20 p.m.

21. **Ms. Helleland** (Norway) said that the Giant Leap programme provided an analysis and follow-up tool that municipalities could use to ensure that the Convention was actively implemented across their services. The programme was being applied in some form in 11 of the country's 18 counties. The county governors played an important role in ensuring comprehensive solutions for children and young people in the municipalities based on the Convention.

22. **Mr. Heimdahl** (Norway), responding to the questions on complaint mechanisms, said that the Government was working to strengthen national appeal systems that were important for children. A new chapter on the school environment in the Education Act, which included provisions for changes to make the appeal system easier, faster and safer for children, had come into force in 2017. The Government was currently considering the recommendations made in 2017 by the committee tasked with examining the possibility of establishing special courts for children and family matters and an administrative court for immigration cases. The Ministry of Children and Equality was considering how to improve children's access to child-friendly information and to complaint mechanisms in child welfare cases.

23. **Ms. Berg** (Norway) said that the county governor's office, which was a specialized authority in child welfare matters, was the appeal body for decisions taken by municipalities in child welfare cases and interventions in institutions. The need to raise awareness among children of their rights in child welfare cases and of the complaints mechanisms available had been identified.

24. **Ms. Flatebakken** (Norway) said that, under the Patients and Users Rights Act, patients and users over the age of 16 and those over the age of 12 who understood the content could lodge a complaint or allow a representative to lodge a complaint on their behalf. For other children under the age of 16, a complaint could be lodged by parents or

guardians. A special committee decided whether children between the ages of 12 and 16 should receive mental health treatment in an institution if they did not give their consent. Efforts were being made to ensure that the committee informed children of their rights and communicated in a child-friendly manner. The Government had appointed a legislative committee to review the rules on using coercion in health and care services, including for children and young people.

25. **Ms. Ferguson** (Norway) said that the Government and the Supreme Court were fully aware that, under article 45 of Convention, the Committee could make suggestions and general recommendations based on information received pursuant to articles 44 and 45 of the Convention. Although general comments were not legally binding, they were considered most relevant in interpreting the rights set forth in the Convention. The Supreme Court distinguished between statements in general comments that clearly expressed the Committee's interpretation of an article of the Convention and statements that were aspirational and concerned a desired development of the law, the former being afforded more weight. It would also be relevant whether the statement by the Committee concerned similar or comparable facts to those in the case in question. In the case mentioned by the Chair, the Supreme Court had considered that the Committee's statement related to the desired development of the law and not to an interpretation of the article in question.

26. **Mr. Saglie** (Norway) said that several measures had been taken to make the procedure of reporting cases of bullying to a county governor's office child-friendly and easily accessible. Children could report directly to the office either orally or in writing and were given the opportunity to be heard. Efforts were being made to raise awareness among children of the County Governor's role in handling bullying cases.

27. **Ms. Giske** (Norway), turning to the subject of the environment and children's rights, said that the Government was committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions in line with the Paris Agreement. The Norwegian petroleum sector had some of the highest environmental standards in the world. Norway was working towards the transition to renewable energy use, although oil and gas would continue to play a role in the global energy mix in the years ahead. Sami interests were taken into consideration in the impact assessments conducted prior to the establishment of oil extracting fields and some projects had been presented to the Sami Parliament. The right for children to have their views heard was embedded in Norwegian climate policy. Children's and youth organizations were invited to public consultations and input meetings and were represented on the Minister of Climate and Environment's advisory climate council.

28. **Ms. Todorova** said that she would be interested to hear more about the role of the Ombudsman for Children and how it engaged with the Government.

29. **Ms. Helleland** (Norway) said that only qualified workers were allowed to work in the oil and gas industry so the issue raised about possible labour exploitation of children was moot.

30. **Mr. Gastaud** said that the delegation might comment on the potential impact on children of new extraction activities, given that areas previously used for fishing or other activities might no longer be accessible to them.

31. **Ms. Stenseth** (Norway) said that her country was rich in unspoilt nature, and children were encouraged to use nature for fishing and sports activities. A fundamental part of Norwegian culture was the right of everyone to use nature regardless of ownership.

32. **Mr. Heimdahl** (Norway) said that the bill on the establishment of a minimum age of 18 years for marriage, without any exceptions, was in its second reading in parliament and would likely be passed in the near future. At present, no provision in the Marriage Act covered unregistered religious marriages. However, the Government was considering introducing such provisions into the Penal Code as part of the Action Plan against Negative Social Control, Forced Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation for the period 2017–2020. In the case of marriages entered into abroad, where neither partner had any affiliation with Norway, the legal concept of the general "*ordre public* reservation" applied. The Government was assessing the question of whether the country's legislation should be

made more restrictive in terms of recognizing foreign marriages, while taking into consideration the consequences for the rights of minors.

33. **Ms. Ferguson** (Norway) said that section 253 of the Penal Code prohibited forced marriage. Although the issue of unregistered religious marriage fell outside the scope of that section, the arrangement was subject to the same penalties under section 252 of the Code as forced marriage. Nonetheless, the Government intended to submit a proposal to include unregistered marriage under section 253 in preparation for public consultation on the matter in the very near future.

34. **Ms. Boye** (Norway) said that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had finished mapping the situation of statelessness in Norway in 2015. The Government had followed up on the relevant UNHCR recommendations by amending the law concerning citizenship applications by stateless persons and by bringing the definition of statelessness into line with international law. Furthermore, in 2016, the Government had instructed the Directorate of Immigration to handle citizenship applications in such a way as to ensure that no child born in Norway was left stateless. The specific requirements for stateless persons would be clarified in the Norwegian Nationality Act.

35. **Mr. Saglie** (Norway) said that the rights of Sami children to an education were enshrined in law. Sami children were entitled to attend Sami language lessons that were offered in the country, subject to there being sufficient numbers of children for a class. As the shortage of qualified Sami teachers remained a challenge, the Government and the Sami Parliament had increased financing for teacher education and introduced a system for partially paying off the student loans of those who would complete a five-year Sami teaching course by or after 2017. The Sami Parliament provided up to 50,000 Norwegian kroner (NKr) in annual scholarships for those who studied the Sami language as part of a preschool or primary school teaching course. Following the issuance of a report by the Sami Language Committee, plans had been made to introduce measures to boost recruitment and improve the skills of teachers in that domain.

36. **Ms. Aldoseri** asked what the Government was doing to facilitate the integration of other minority groups, such as immigrants and members of religious minorities, into the education system.

37. **Mr. Saglie** (Norway) said that schools sought to create a positive and welcoming environment for all students. Children from immigrant families received introductory Norwegian language classes and had the right to be taught in their mother tongue until such time as they were able to speak Norwegian well enough to be able to participate in classes on an equal footing with other pupils.

38. **Mr. Cardona Llorens** said that he wished to know what activities had been designed to enable Norwegian children to understand cultural diversity within the classroom and thus avert potential discrimination and stigmatization.

39. **Mr. Saglie** (Norway) said that the teaching of tolerance and respect for different cultural backgrounds was an integral part of several school subjects. Teachers were obliged to act as soon as they became aware of bullying and harassment. Furthermore, county governors had been given the authority to impose monetary sanctions on schools that did not follow up on complaints of bullying.

40. **Mr. Pedernera Reyna** asked what measures the State party had taken to increase tolerance towards and prevent racism against minority communities.

41. **Ms. Skarstein** (Norway) said that a number of action plans were in place to combat ethnic and religious discrimination. Many young people from minority groups were reportedly afraid to participate in public debates because of hate speech and abuse. The issue was high on the Government's agenda and a strategy had been launched to tackle the problem.

42. The portrayal of gender roles and gender stereotyping in the media placed pressure on children and adolescents and made it hard for them to make decisions that challenged those roles. Little was known about the media's impact on gender equality. A committee

had been established to assess the difficulties faced by children and adolescents within the family, school and leisure environments in that area and to propose measures to achieve gender equality. Many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex children felt that they were not viewed as meeting social expectations and often struggled with poor mental health. They were also underrepresented in children's services, and limited data were available on intersex children in particular. An action plan for combating discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression contained a series of measures specifically targeted at children and young people.

43. As for the questions concerning the wording of the replies to the list of issues (CRC/C/NOR/Q/5-6/Add.1, para. 84), the text was intended to emphasize the fact that the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act recognized the rights of children, adults and the elderly equally.

44. **Ms. Din** (Norway) said that the law had been changed to allow children between the ages of 6 and 16 to change their legal gender and name with the consent of both parents. If only one parent consented to the change, applications could be granted subject to approval by the county governor.

45. **Ms. Berg** (Norway) said that 12 complaints relating to child welfare had been lodged with the European Court of Human Rights in recent years, citing violations of the right to family life under article 8 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. The Court had requested the Norwegian authorities to comment on nine of the complaints and had found no violation in the remaining three. One of the latter cases, which concerned adoption, had been referred on appeal to the Grand Chamber and would be heard in October 2018. Should the Court find that there had been a violation of the European Convention on Human Rights, changes would be made to the Child Welfare Act and the practice of the Norwegian authorities and courts. The child welfare system could only be reassessed once the reasoning of the Court had been made known.

46. **Ms. Ferguson** (Norway) said that the Government was not currently in a position to withdraw its reservation to article 10 (2) (b) and (3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. However, steps were taken to ensure that children were detained separately from adults in accordance with the Committee's concluding observations (CRC/C/NOR/CO/4, para. 58). The places established in the two existing units set aside for juveniles were more than sufficient to accommodate the number of adolescents in detention. There were circumstances in which detention in juvenile facilities was not considered to be in the children's best interests, for example, where it was deemed necessary to keep a young person close to the family home or to avoid transporting him or her across the country. Special regulations concerning the treatment and rights of juveniles deprived of their liberty were in effect in all prison settings, and ordinary prisons received guidance on how to provide appropriate conditions and treatment for young persons.

47. **Mr. Saglie** (Norway) said that, according to the Education Act, the subject of Christianity, religion, philosophies of life and ethics in the school curriculum had to be presented in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner. The goal was to provide information about Christianity, not to preach it. The curriculum was currently under review and the content was liable to change over the coming years.

48. **Ms. Galand** (Norway) said that the Government subsidized an association that sought to sensitize adults and children to the responsible use of the Internet and social media networks, particularly the issues of data protection and the sharing of photographs. The Safer Internet Centre played a similar role and had a telephone line, chat forum and an email address where children could anonymously discuss Internet-related concerns and receive advice.

49. **Mr. Saglie** (Norway) said that the framework plans for teacher training programmes specifically required trainee teachers to have an understanding of the needs and rights of children and young people. As a result of the change to the teacher training curriculum in 2016/17, graduates were expected to be able to create inclusive learning environments, recognize signs of bullying, violence and sexual abuse and take appropriate action in conjunction with the relevant bodies to address those issues.

50. **Ms. Brandt** (Norway) said that the Committee's concluding observations had been translated into Norwegian but not into the country's minority languages.

51. **Mr. Saglie** (Norway) said that more data on bullying relating to vulnerable groups were required. Questions about the subject had been removed from a yearly survey as they violated the right to privacy of children in small communities. The Ministry of Education and Research was currently preparing a survey on the use of physical force against school pupils, and the information gathered would provide a basis for developing regulations and teacher training. The Government had allocated NKr 18 million to anti-bullying measures. One of the initiatives introduced as part of the Escalation Plan against Violence and Abuse campaign was designed to enable schools to provide guidance to parents and children regarding the safe use of social media networks. The national budget allocation had been doubled to enable county governors to handle bullying and harassment cases swiftly and effectively.

52. **Ms. Ferguson** (Norway) said that the Public Administration Act governed the activities of all administrative agencies, unless otherwise covered by a specific statute, and should be read in conjunction with other legislation. The Convention had been incorporated into national law by the Human Rights Act, section 3 of which stated that the provisions of the Convention took precedence over any conflicting provision of national law. Furthermore, the Human Rights Act established the best interests of children as a fundamental principle to be applied in the interpretation of laws affecting children.

53. **Ms. Kolvig** (Norway) said that the principle of the best interests of the child formed the basis of a number of provisions in the Immigration Act and was invoked in family immigration cases and cases involving the possible expulsion of parents. To provide additional support, the Directorate of Immigration and the Immigration Appeals Board had established children's competence teams, and the immigration authorities had held several seminars to raise awareness among caseworkers of children's rights. The Board had hired a part-time psychiatrist to assist caseworkers and was currently in the process of recruiting a part-time child psychologist. Under the Immigration Act, children involved in asylum cases could submit statements orally, in writing or through a representative, without needing the consent of the parents. Children were interviewed where necessary, unless they objected. The Government intended to increase the number of opportunities for children to be heard by the Immigration Appeals Board.

54. **Ms. Flatebakken** (Norway) said that the law afforded everyone the right to health care, regardless of background or physical or mental capacity. The best interests of the child, as provided for in the Human Rights Act and the Constitution, were a fundamental consideration when decisions affecting children in the health sector were taken. Health legislation contained specific provisions to cater for the specific needs and rights of children, including the right to be informed and to be heard. The Ministry of Health and Care Services considered new legislative amendments on an ongoing basis to ensure that children received the best possible service.

55. **Ms. Berg** (Norway) said that the Child Welfare Act had been amended in March 2018 and now granted children the right to be heard in all matters concerning them at all stages of welfare cases, with due account being taken of their level of maturity. The Act also required social welfare services, including the county social welfare boards, to document the child's views and the consideration that they had been given. The documentation procedure would help strengthen the child's right to participate in practice. The amended Act would take effect in July 2018.

56. **Mr. Heimdahl** (Norway) said that the State was responsible for ensuring that children had a say in all matters concerning them. In mandatory mediation processes, parents were informed that children had the right to participate and children were encouraged to exercise that right. Mediators guided children's involvement in the process, depending on their level of awareness and the requirements set down in the law. Parents and children alike were encouraged to review mediation agreements. All mediators in the family counselling services had expertise in family disputes and the relevant rules and regulations. A handbook was currently being written on how best to conduct mediation discussions involving children.

57. **Ms. Aldoseri** said that she wondered whether the amended Child Welfare Act would address the questions of children's rights to parental care and the reportedly disproportionate number of children being placed in alternative care. She wished to know what culturally sensitive parental guidance was available to families from minority groups, including Roma and immigrant families, to promote dialogue with them and assist them in raising children so as to reduce the number of children taken into care. She would appreciate statistics on the number of Roma, Sami and unaccompanied children, as well as the number of children of deported persons, who had been placed in alternative care. It would be helpful to learn whether any studies had been conducted to identify the root causes of the increase in the demand for child welfare services in certain counties. Given that, according to her information, 60 per cent of siblings were separated upon being taken into care, she would appreciate information on the concrete measures taken to end the practice. Had the State party translated the United Nations guidelines for the appropriate use and conditions of alternative care for children into Norwegian and other minority languages? Had the Government provided training to child welfare staff on how to evaluate the best interests of children before deciding to remove them from their families and on how to periodically review and monitor children in foster care?

58. Noting the recent increase in the number of children with disabilities who received special needs education, she said that she would be interested to know the percentage of those children who received inclusive education. Did the Anti-discrimination and Accessibility Act guarantee full inclusive education to children with disabilities? It would be useful to hear what support was given and what plans were in place to prevent the abandonment of children with disabilities by their parents.

59. The State party's efforts to curb the use of drugs to treat children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder were commendable. It would be helpful to have statistics on the current use of psychostimulant drugs, including amphetamines, for treating children diagnosed with the disorder. In view of the significant increase in the use of such medicines in certain counties compared to the stable nationwide trend, she would be grateful for further information on the steps taken to ensure that all counties complied with guidelines not to prescribe medicines as a first line treatment. Noting that twice as many boys as girls in the 10–14 age group were treated with psychostimulants, she said that she wished to hear about the State party's efforts to identify the root causes of mental disorders in general and among boys in particular. Had any studies been conducted and, if so, what had the outcomes been? She invited the delegation to account for data showing that only 38 per cent of the children and adolescents in care institutions who had been diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder received specialist health care. It would be useful to know what support was provided to parents caring for children with psychiatric disorders in the family setting. Given that, in many instances, children diagnosed with attention deficit disorder were actually suffering from trauma, she asked whether the children were reassessed after the initial diagnosis and what regular assessment procedures were in place.

60. Turning to the subject of the environment and children's rights, she noted that Norway had strict environmental legislation at the national level; however, exports of Norwegian oil resulted in the violation of children's rights to a healthy environment in other countries. She wished to know how the State party planned to mitigate the adverse impacts of fossil fuel exports and to combat climate change. She would also be grateful for an explanation as to how the Government protected the food chain from the large amounts of mining waste dumped in fjords, which polluted a major source of nutrition for many children.

61. She would be interested to hear the reaction of non-Christian children and their parents to the introduction of the Christianity, religion, philosophies of life and ethics subject in schools and she would also like to know about the impact in terms of school attendance. In that connection, it would be helpful to know how the education authorities guaranteed children from religious minority communities access to human rights-based education. She wondered which part of the curriculum had been designed to raise awareness of gender and sexuality issues among pupils.

62. **Mr. Kotrane** said that the State party's progress in improving access to education had been commendable. Nevertheless, he was concerned that unaccompanied minors

seeking asylum and aged between 15 and 18 received lower standards of care than children under the protection of the child welfare services, that children in reception centres were frequently absent from school, suffered from psychological disorders and were prone to self-harm and suicide attempts and that asylum-seeking children were subject to deportation to unsafe countries, in violation of the principle of non-refoulement. He wished to know what measures the State would take to address those problems.

63. The Committee welcomed the legislative amendments introduced to abolish the use of solitary confinement for minors. It would be interested in hearing how the State party promoted the use of non-judicial measures, including diversion programmes, probation and mediation, and ensured that detention was ordered only as a last resort for the shortest time possible and that children were never held together with adults. He wondered what the maximum period of detention for a minor was.

64. The State party had made laudable advances in terms of implementing the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. Nonetheless, he asked what steps the State party had taken to: bring the Penal Code fully into line with the Optional Protocol, particularly with regard to the sale of children; adopt specific legislation on the obligations of Internet service providers concerning child pornography; and abolish the dual criminality requirement to allow Norwegian nationals who had committed violations of the Optional Protocol abroad to be prosecuted.

65. **Ms. Otani** said that she wished to know whether the Government planned to conduct any specific research on children in street situations and to develop special measures for them. It would be helpful to have statistics on the prevalence of online social exploitation and abuse of children, including grooming, sexual extortion and child pornography. An area of particular concern was the exploitation of boys, who were less likely to report instances of abuse. She wondered whether the State party had any information in that regard and what measures had been planned to tackle the problem.

66. With regard to violence and abuse in schools, she wished to know whether nurses were stationed in all schools and, if so, what role they played in identifying violence and in supporting victims. It would also be helpful to know what budgetary resources had been allocated to those support services.

67. **The Chair** said that she would be interested to know how many children lived in prison together with their parents, whether judges took into consideration the fact that defendants had children and what assistance was given to children whose parents were in prison in order to protect them from discrimination and hardship. She wondered what legal assistance was afforded to child witnesses and victims in court, particularly in trafficking and domestic violence cases. Did children have access to free legal aid?

68. Turning to the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, she wondered whether it was necessary to have a system that allowed adolescents aged between 16 and 18 to join the Norwegian Home Guard, especially given that they were not subject to any form of military discipline. Could they not carry out the same activities without being involved in the military? She asked what provisions existed for dealing with children who had been involved in hostilities outside of Norway. She would appreciate clarification of reports that residence permits were not granted to asylum-seeking children who had participated in hostilities abroad.

69. **Ms. Aldoseri** said that she was concerned about the lack of time for children's leisure activities outside of school and would appreciate the delegation's comments on the action taken to address that issue. Lastly, she asked what plans the Government had to increase the participation of children with disabilities in recreational and social activities.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.